

TRANSFERENCE OF MEANING FROM ANALYST TO POLICY MAKER IN INTELLIGENCE

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Abstract: *This paper focuses on the significance of negotiating the meaning in the communication between analyst and decision maker. In other words, although the analyst and the decision maker use the same language, we need to make sure that the output of the communication process actually returns to the input provided, by mediating the effective conveyance of meaning. Whereas words and conventions are universal, in the sense that they are shared by the members of the same linguistic community, meaning is a product of individual neuro-psychophysiology. The meaning of the message we convey is reflected by the answer we get, which reveals the interlocutor's understanding of our words, and that may have everything or nothing to do with our intentions. If we do not negotiate the meaning of the input we supply, we cannot control the output thereof, and therefore the message could be valid for the disclosing party alone. In order to communicate efficiently, we need to adhere to a set of concepts and values governing our interlocutor's outlook, and to be able to adapt the substance of our message by reference to the output we expect. In intelligence analysis, information is directly related to the recipient and his representations. The recipient's singularity entails the unique and contextual nature of the information.*

Keywords: *meaning; communication process; explicit feedback; intelligence analysis; decision making*

1. MEANING AND FUNCTION IN EFFICIENT COMMUNICATION

Intelligence analysis, at the same time the most fascinating and the most misconstrued component of the intelligence cycle, has generated disputed and polemics about its place and role in governmental intelligence but also in competitive intelligence. This study seeks to launch a debate on the concept of meaning, starting from the relevance of feedback in the relationship between analyst and beneficiary. According to the dictionary definition, meaning splits into three lines of use: the first, the intrinsic one, is the semantic content of a word, i.e. the sense; the second is the extrinsic one, rendered by the signs' function of representing something that is independent from them, as a denotation of the things that they are describing; last but not least, the third one is the metadiscourse, i.e. either the symbolic value, the significance, or the importance or value of a fact or of an object.

Feedback, as an essential component of self-adjustment mechanisms, was used for the first time by Norbert Wiener in "Cybernetics, or control and communication in the animal and the machine". Subsequently, the concept was also taken over by communication sciences as "all verbal and non-

verbal messages that a person transmits consciously or unconsciously in reply to the message of another", and it is "necessary to determine the extent to which the message was understood, believed and accepted".

American researcher Melvin DeFleur proposes an analysis of communication from the perspective of a correspondence between the significance given to the message by interlocutors. For said author, human communication entails "determining significance from other persons". Thus, convention lies at the foundation of communication, within the meaning of a social contract connecting "a certain word to subjective internal experiences, that the members of the linguistic community agreed to be appropriate for such word". The merit of the DeFleur model is that of outlining the impossibility of establishing the perfect match between meanings. In this context, dialogue, the main condition of which is isomorphism, becomes virtually impossible. In exchange, what can be created is a dynamic connection through feedback mechanisms, in order to adjust the meanings of the message rendered from one interlocutor to the other.

DeFleur's model, by the role awarded to convention in communication, captures the

essential connection between significance, as a subjective internal representation, and feedback, however without going deeper than that. The need for the reverse connection is based on the need for a consensus between interlocutors, as regards meaning, because “words do not have meanings, but functions”, and, as Ludwig Wittgenstein said, we need not look for the “sense of a word, but for its manner of use”.

This perspective, captured by the interdisciplinary model of neuro-linguistics, points out that while words and conventions are universal, in the sense that they are shared by the members of a linguistic community, significance is a construct of individual psycho-neuro-physiology.

Basically, words, as symbolic elements of human communication, are nothing else than mere conventions, with limited function and relevance. They do not preserve, in themselves, universal realities, whereas they are indicators of phenomenological classes. When we hear a word, we develop on the inside what psycho-linguists call a transderivational search.

The purpose of this internalization is to find the most pertinent referential index to guide us, clearly and without a doubt, the understanding of the concept. It is self-explanatory that these referential indices are *sui generis* synthetic products, shaped by individual experience. Thus, the significance of a term is totally subjective, bearing the imprint of a strictly personal history. This is precisely why, in communication, in our capacity as transmitting party, we are unaware of what we are communicating until our interlocutor, in his capacity as receiving party, closes the loop of the reverse connection whereby he communicates the meaning bestowed upon the message. In other words, the meaning of what we are communicating lies in the answer that we get, which points to what our interlocutor understood, irrespective of our intentions. In absence of feedback, the message is meaningful and valid for the transmitting party alone.

2. TAILORING ANALYTICAL PRODUCTS TO CUSTOMER NEEDS

2.1 Intelligence cycle as a self-adjustment system. To communicate efficiently means, first of all, to align oneself from a psycho-neuro-linguistic perspective to the paradigm governing the interlocutor's understanding, and secondly to be open to change the content of what we are communicating, until we get the desired result.

Thus construed, communication is a self-adjustment system, where there are no failures, just

feedback. In other words, the resistance to the communicated message points to the lack of alignment and flexibility in the approach. Our interlocutor never says “NO”, but “NOT LIKE THIS”, constantly telling us, by his reaction, the path to follow in order to reach our goal.

The pragmatic relevance of this theoretical development in the field of intelligence analysis resides in that information is not written randomly, but by direct reference to the beneficiary, to his manner of (re)presenting reality. The unique nature of the beneficiary's personality claims the unique nature of the information, particularly in intelligence analysis, where feedback is more likely indirect and inferred.

Moreover, just as in interpersonal communication we do not presume that we were understood strictly based on the conventions of our mother tongue, when communicating and intelligence product we cannot afford to infer the meaning that it triggers at the beneficiary's level. The meaning is, in fact, a negotiation, and the feedback is the foundation of the negotiation. Without feedback, we cannot talk of communication, but merely of monologues, whereby interlocutors, based on the limited semantic overlaps, successively state, in all their honesty, “But I told you so” – “But that's not how I understood it”.

In this context, we cannot speak of the intelligence cycle as a self-adjustment system, as long as we rely on inferred feedback. Moreover, the purpose of intelligence activity should not be simply to use analytical products by transmitting them to the beneficiary, but we are subject to the obligation, as a *sine qua non* prerequisite of our efficiency, to go from implicit to explicit feedback.

2.2 From uncertainty to persuasion in decision making. Intelligence analysis takes into account the community's need to present a product that is useful to its various beneficiaries; in North-American specialized literature, this is defined as a product “tailored” to answer the specific needs of the clients. The relationship to the policy makers is active, not passive, and the accent placed on analysis, presentation and persuasion distinguishes “intelligence” from information sources which provide data, such as radar images for immediate operational use, or real time warnings for missile launches.

Ambassador Paul Wolfowitz (in Indonesia, in 1986 - 1989), former undersecretary of defense, believes that the main challenge for policy makers is to make decisions in terms of uncertainty. One

of the requirements for success is that the policy maker becomes the main analyst in the focal points of his agenda. Responsible policy makers are, in the ambassador's opinion, those who do not delegate the evaluation of information, because they are the final analyst in the interpretation chain where the end beneficiary is the president. As a work method, he must adopt the analytical procedure whereby he is ready to fight, based on incomplete information and conflicting premises.

Analytical materials disfavouring explanations to the benefit of forecasts and promoting the analyst's opinions to the disadvantage of evidence are of little use to policy makers. This does not mean that the deliberative process resulting in the field of uncertainty must be kept silent, because otherwise the policy maker could deduce that the degree of uncertainty of the analyst is minor. In the position of the policy maker, Wolfowitz is of the opinion that only a tight cooperation between the political level and intelligence officers can ensure the management of uncertainty and challenges in making efficient decisions. While the analyst and the intelligence collector must know the working agenda of the policy makers and must become aware of the fact that the processes in reliance upon they make decisions are mostly intricate and informal, the decision maker must establish such relationships to the intelligence community so as to be able to guide same in the professional cooperation of the two groups. Their bear negative effects not only on policy and information, but even worse, on state interest.

In stating that "great harm is done if differences in professional values cause the two groups to avoid close contact", Ambassador Wolfowitz suggests that good cooperation is possible where "intelligence production should be driven by the policy process" (Davis, 1996:37). To this effect, the Ambassador adds, inspired by his own practices, that the formal intelligence reports have a lesser impact than interpersonal exchanges of ideas, further to which the decision maker can draw his own conclusions based on the debates between intelligence experts.

"Formalized lists of intelligence requirements, prepared a year or more in advance, cannot substitute for a more active policymaker involvement" (Davis, 1996:38), says the Ambassador. Therefore, the intelligence community must present its own working procedures to the decision makers in a more transparent manner. If they better understand the collection and production process of intelligence, they can direct more efficiently the resources

particular to intelligence work so as to reduce uncertainty and to determine the objective and clear examination of the issues causing confusion.

In order to build or render the relationship between analyst and beneficiary more efficient, it is not sufficient that just one of the poles is made responsible. So far, the analytical level was the main focus, pointing out the limits and errors of the mental layouts and processes that analysts operate with in drafting their materials. The decision maker's responsibility in the decision making process is rarely mentioned. As regards the actual study of the processual aspect of decision making, this is an exception. The rules or principles guiding same could be useful for analysts but also to decision makers. The first could use them in drafting the materials that would have the critical degree of persuasion so as to convince the authorities to act, and the latter could use them to construe the decisions that the opponents' actions could be based upon. On an institutional level, decisions are agreed upon in meetings, they are not made by individuals. Decisions are collective, not personal; the system depends upon reaching consensus and it does not promote individual stands; decisions must arise from debate and reasoning, not intuition or conviction. This article questions these current rules and re-circulates them in a larger holistic context.

The state of facts resulting from previous and current research – the small number of studies on the beneficiary's role in intelligence work and the way in which decisions are made – points to the frailty of the relationship, if any, or to the lack thereof. "Very few guidelines appear to have been devised to assist the analyst or the policymaker to follow some logical process in reconstructing the adversary's decisionmaking process. In the pressures of a crisis situation, and lacking any body of experience or agreed "rules" that might be of assistance, there has been some tendency in the Intelligence Community to ignore this problem" (Cynthia Grabo, 2002:103).

2.3 The need for a code of good practices in the relationship between the analyst and the beneficiary Specialized literature is filled with classifications and explanations for the pathology of intelligence analysis and, in a smaller extent, errors in interpreting the results of analysis work by its beneficiaries. Still, it is necessary to determine a code of good practices in the relationship between the analyst and the beneficiary, since the history of success owed to good communication between intelligence services

and decision makers was not examined enough. It is perhaps not surprising that the focus on failures eludes the series of success in fighting threats against national and international security and, moreover, it decreases the chances to learn from the experience of others for all apprentices of intelligence work. Underlining what did not work perpetuates the unsuccessful practices, whereas innovating proposals sometimes only deepen the imbalances already existing between the relationship among intelligence producers and their clients. On the contrary, the careful examination of what went well in view of finding a successful method in reaching the goals of intelligence work could be the start of a new era for the professionals working in this field. In other words, the saying that we learn from our mistakes proves to be obsolete, since intelligence work is not only about learning, but especially about development to reach excellence and top performances. And this is the solution proposed by neuro-linguistic programming as a coherent strategy in the process of learning excellence.

The basic principles of an efficient communication are distinct from the matter of said communication, since they pertain to its structure. Thus, the main pillars are awareness, honesty, responsibility, acceptance and assertiveness. These characteristics can be regarded as necessary but insufficient premises of the relationship between the analyst and the beneficiary. Some authors point to eluding these premises: "Experience has shown that a large number of individuals – and often including those whose judgments or statements will carry the most weight – are rendering opinions in critical situations either in ignorance of important facts or without recognizing the relevance or significance of certain information which they may know" (Grabo, 2002:10). Being aware that any type of information, either a regular one, a warning or a forecast, cannot be given with absolute certainty, being a constant assessment of probabilities, is the duty of the decision maker. Awareness without assertiveness is just another type of ignorance or lack of awareness. The beneficiary must undertake and acknowledge by clear assertions that he does not know decisive elements of the state of facts or that he chose to ignore both the importance and the meaning of others, often without being able to identify the psychological mechanism of his actions. To integrate failure and transform it into development towards excellence of intelligence work, we must clearly state that what was done unknowingly and what could have been done

knowing everything that was available when the decision was made.

Furthermore, the beneficiary must understand that, in some cases – and usually, although rare, they are the most important and stressful, he will have to admit less firm lines of reasoning or those that are based on less material evidence that they would like. At this point, awareness must be doubled by the responsibility to encourage such assessments, although the predetermining reaction would be to repudiate them. On the other hand, intelligence analysts must bear in their minds the acute lack of time of high-level decision makers. Therefore, the analyst must assume the fact that reports with no clear or explicit warnings on the probable actions of the opponents they will fail in communicating their clues to the author. The responsibility in case the beneficiary does not receive the warning message lies with the analyst who failed to formulate it clearly. Finally, the efficient communication between the analyst and the beneficiary pertains to the purpose of intelligence work: supporting the beneficiary's making the best decision in light of the facts and lines of reasoning communicated to him, and if need be, taking action.

If the decision maker is not convinced or for various reasons, cannot take the necessary measures, the intelligence effort was useless. The responsibility lies with both parties, not only one of the poles. Moreover, the demonization of one or the other, analyst or beneficiary, is useless, if the events could have been influenced towards a beneficial direction.

Regardless of how intelligence and policy function in relation to one another, or how dependent or independent the policy level may be, the important thing in the end is that appropriate action is taken, when needed, to protect the interests of national security and the security of our allies. Without this, the warning function of intelligence will have failed no matter how brilliant the collection and analytical effort may have been (Grabo, 2002:16).

Due to the lack of trust in the impersonal intelligence machine, the beneficiary can choose to produce his own intelligence. The fact that the product of intelligence work lacks subjectivity in order to attain an unrealistic goal of objectivity determines the decision maker to extract himself from the relationship with the intelligence community and to follow his intellectual curiosity, recurring directly to open sources in order to form an opinion in reliance upon which to make a decision.

It does appear that actions have been taken at the policy level to which intelligence contributed little directly, or that policymakers have run ahead of the formal processes of intelligence in taking action to forestall possible threatened actions of adversary or potentially hostile states (Grabo, 2002:16).

The ideal of objectivity is unrealistic if silenced, because one cannot elude the fact that intelligence professionals make judgments all the time, they act upon them or they present them in various publications or information sessions. Ever since the data collection phase, the intelligence officer makes a judgment call in choosing to forward a certain piece of information or not to the central office. Afterwards, the analyst deciding to draft or not a report on a certain piece of information makes another judgment call. The manner in which he drafts the report, the focus on a certain aspect or another of the information entails another judgment call. The elements that the immediate superior selects to include in an information report to the department management are the results of another judgment call. In a nutshell, the intelligence system could not work and would be entirely useless to the beneficiary if the judgment were not an integral part of the work process.

The huge quantity of data collected makes it impossible to operate in any other manner, but it also places greater responsibility to formulate intelligent and pertinent lines of reasoning on the obscure mass of members in the lower ranks of the system, and last but not least on the raw data collectors in the field.

If facts do not speak for themselves to policy officials, neither do they necessarily do so to intelligence analysts and their supervisors. Or, if they seem to be doing so, it will often be found on further analysis that not all are hearing the same oracle, not by any means (Garbo, 2002:134).

Interpretation variations, sometimes polar opposites, that a group of people ends up with starting from the same set of facts, even when the facts are relatively simple and uncontroversial, are astounding for the people who are not part of the working group. Generally speaking, interpretation discrepancies are higher the more one advances in processing clues, from the raw data collection phase towards the stage of final assessment of the opponent's actions. For instance, it will be easier to reach consensus in the data collection phase, where data are clues or potential clues, than in regard to their meaning. It will be all the more difficult to

gain unanimity on that the facts or clues mean that the opponent is ready to start hostile or threatening actions against state interests.

2.4 Decision maker's responsibility in shaping up the intelligence product. The conservatism displayed by analysts in receiving and processing new types of data, specific to the contemporary world, is caused by a fundamental principle of rigorous research: postponing to make a judgment call until sufficient clear data is available to decide on the meaning of new information. Thus, the impact of the nature of information is not reflected only on the investigation and analysis of the atypical data, but also on the relationship with the beneficiary. Not undertaking the risk of analyzing controversial issues and of producing reports comprising "bad news" is particular to bureaucratic intelligence organizations. One of the most difficult tests of maturity in intelligence work is preparing and submitting reports that the decision maker does not want to hear, particularly when they are contradictory or they question the legitimacy of a policy already in place.

The analyst's reticence is doubled by the beneficiary's need for consistency, since he wants to hear something that confirms his own interpretation. The relationship between them is built on their deficiencies. The absence of a method of approaching atypical data and problems, as well as the lack of personnel especially appointed to process and analyze them leads to postponing the examination thereof, or even to disregarding them. However, the incoherence or absurdity of the opponent's actions are carrying the meaning in decrypting his intentions. Despite the reticence which is understandable of submitting evidence or clues that entail a difficult or dangerous decision on the authorities' part, especially as long as there are doubts as regards the need to make such a decision, the honesty of the expert analyst will be decided and improved in such contexts. As regards the beneficiary, the openness and courage of his thinking will be tested in accepting that which seems unbelievable.

The path towards understanding the opponent's objectives, specificity and decision making processes is risky. The analyst, the decision maker or the military strategist must make a conscious effort of imagination to put themselves in the other's position and see the matter from his perspective. Serious errors in judgment and one of the most detrimental estimates of the opponent's intentions were blamed on such failure in

perception or understanding. The ability to understand or at least to grasp what happens in the mind of the other is the mark of a multi-disciplinary expert. This ability is hard to gain and it seems difficult to implement it in practice, even when the opponent makes no special effort to hide his opinions on a certain matter, or even more, he expresses them clearly.

Coming back to the interest bestowed by specialized literature to intelligence analysis and drafting reports in reply to the beneficiary's requirements, we can see the imbalance caused by the lack of attention towards the responsibility of the decision maker.

Knowledge is power— sometimes. At other times it proves erroneous, irrelevant, or impotent. The power of knowledge depends on who has it, how accurate it is, and how it can be used. Knowledge does not speak for itself. Useful knowledge can be buried or sidetracked or distorted within the complexity of modern government and the hectic pace of work at high levels. To produce power, knowledge must be not only correct but integrated and communicated effectively to the policymakers and implementers in a position to use it productively—the intelligence “consumers.” Then those consumers who are in a position to turn the knowledge into power must be sure not to misunderstand or misuse it. Because knowledge is a combination of facts and beliefs intermingled in the minds of decision makers and implementers, ideology and intelligence often prove hard to disentangle (Betts, 2007:14-15).

It is equally important, or even more so, that the beneficiary understands what can be supplied or not by the intelligence community, and that they must have a constant path of communication, i.e. dialogue. Leaders, both in the intelligence community and in the political one, must maintain a constant and consistent exchange with the working group of the intelligence community to avoid corruption of information and communication gaps. In order to secure the full and appropriate support of the intelligence community, the decision maker is subject to the following obligations:

- a) to ask that he be presented with the minority and dissonant opinions, and the facts substantiating same;
- b) to offer certain explanations, insofar as possible, as regards the reasons for which he asks for certain information and for which purpose they are to serve;
- c) to make sure that the data from the information and operational reports are not

uselessly divided for the sake of compartmentalization or that they are not kept secret from the intelligence staff;

- d) to ask the correct questions, because the attitude and requests of decision makers shape up the facts reported by the intelligence community and the manner in which they report same.

One of the most difficult things for analysts to find out is what people higher in the chain of command actually know in the way of facts and how they have interpreted them. As intelligence has evolved from the rather small, informal shops which prevailed after World War II to a large and highly organized bureaucracy, these problems have been compounded. It is safe to say that most analysts never get to talk with anyone at the policy level, and that their understanding of what these officials know, and need to know, is likely to be extremely limited. One result of the failure of intelligence to provide the policymaker with judgments therefore is likely to be that the official will make his own judgments, but will make them on the basis of inadequate information – or at least without benefit of interpretation which might have assisted him. These difficulties of course are compounded in warning situations when the volume of information is both much greater than normal and its interpretation more complex (Grabo, 2002:136).

3. WISE INTELLIGENCE

If the central pillars of efficient communication are awareness, honesty, acceptance and assertiveness, wisdom or altruism are its keystone. The intelligence activity takes place between two opposite poles: decision makers and analysts, both consumed by the same disease, of individualism and individualism. In her own words, “policymakers are highly individualistic” (Grabo, 2002:137), and “intelligence is self-serving and seeks to justify its usefulness and importance by stirring up unnecessary flaps” (Grabo, 2002:166). As long as communication between them is blocked under the weight of individualism and selfishness, the chances to reach excellence are minimal and those who gain it represent the exception. The rule of the king of the jungle applies, in this case of the decision makers, whose guidelines and directives as regards what is useful and necessary are transient and subject to chance.

Policy officials generally, in this view, distrust intelligence in some measure, not because it is incompetent or lacks imagination, but because it is self-serving and seeks to justify its usefulness and importance by stirring up unnecessary flaps. Insofar

as this opinion prevails among policy officials, it is gravely in error and a potential cause of much misunderstanding. In my considerable experience with this type of problem, it has been evident that the Intelligence Community tends to be extremely cautious in reaching alarming conclusions and to pick its words with great care so as not to appear to be nervous or unprofessional. The generally prevailing view is that the sophisticated intelligence analyst should never get excited, never lose his cool, and never use colourful adjectives or other strong phrases to convey his meaning. Rather, he should play down the situation, appear calm and detached. The greatest sin of all is to be alarmist, or to rock the boat (Grabo, 2002:167).

The unpredictability of individuals and of their manner of work, how much they want to know and in what way, will cause that the requirements set forth for the intelligence community differ from one month to the next, or even from one day to the next. A beginner would conclude that changes arise from the fact that the dynamics of the international situation or the arbitrariness of the events, when, in fact, most of them are determined by the decision makers' will. Wisdom – a source of excellence – requires that one sets aside his own small interests and opens up towards the other (the analyst towards the beneficiary and vice versa) in light of the etymological meaning of the word “communication”, in Latin, *communis,-e*, “belonging to several, or to everybody), i.e. that of communion and sharing (communion, Eucharist). According to Charles Morris, communication means bringing together, sharing and transmitting properties between a number of aspects. In intelligence work, sharing between the analyst and the beneficiary is merely the seed of ensuring and imparting with the rest the safety and security without which none could follow the deeper call of the humanity within, transgressing the petty interests of the individual.

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